



Observer report of the 8th Open European Mahjong Championship 2026 Uppsala (MCR, MERS 6)

Observer: Ildikó Hargitai

Date: July 2-5 2026

Place: Uppsala, Sweden

Website or other source(s) of information: <https://oemc2026.uppsalamahjong.se>

Participants: 168 players, 42 teams from 17 countries

France; 46
Netherlands; 23
Italy; 17
Sweden; 15
Germany; 12
Spain; 11
Belgium; 7
Denmark; 7
Switzerland; 6
Hungary; 4
Austria; 1
Great Britain; 1
Portugal; 1
China; 8
Japan; 4
Independent; 3
Canada; 2

Playing schedule: 3 days, 11 sessions

Location: Norrlands Nation Fest & Konferens, Uppsala, Sweden

Equipment: We played with new mahjong sets and new tables. The mahjong sets were provided by the Mahjong International League, MIL, /thanks for Wenlong Li/ The really beautiful flower tiles was designed by Violette Zhenyue.

Refereeing: The 5 referees;

Astrid Astrid Dubedout /France/
Johan Eklund /Sweden/
Sebastian Lavallée /Denmark/
Yulong Zhao /France/
Csaba Szöke /Hungary/

Thanks for Petter and Annika Ranefall the tournament was a big success, very well organised with real time score viewing. There was no late start at any sessions even when they changed the schedule on the last day for helping travelling players. Every information was displayed on the screens and in words.

There were enough people to help and enough referees to ensure fair play.

Complaints: A few in emails and a lot in person from various players from different countries.

There was no announcement of the observer from the leading referee in the beginning of the tournament.

The main topic of the complaints was the playing area.

The building is a beautiful old place by the canal in the city centre with wide stairways and one big hall.

We played in the big hall and in one side room and it was dark in both. There was no proper lighting system but big and beautiful old chandeliers about 6 meters above us with dimmed light. It was difficult to see each other, in some moments the tiles. At my last table I played with someone who couldn't make a difference between the character tiles. He was asking us all the time. It wasn't fair for him, or us.

There was also not enough air in the playing area. The 180 people including the players, the helpers and the visitors, sucked the oxygen out of the room in a very short time. As one player explained it to me; dim light and no air dims the brain.

Playing a European Championship in a dark room which lacks oxygen isn't fair play.

The championship was played on the first floor of the building but the toilets were on the ground floor, which made it difficult for some players to get down and back to play during sessions. Unfortunately, there was no elevator to avoid the 33 stairs. /A player counted them/

The lunches were served in a fast and efficient way but I also got some complaints about the food selection and quality compared to the registration fee. There was no selection of food. You got fish or chicken whether you liked it or not. Players explained it like; 'It was a European Championship, we paid a lot and got boiled potatoes for lunch. What should cost 300 euros if we got food for 10 a day, 20 if we include the coffee and snacks?'

After the last game of the tournament there was no water and no coffee in the lobby, they packed up everything before we finished.

Information / communication during the tournament:

One of the best parts was the live ranking system visible on the screens all the time. Five assistants were working five laptops to put the results into the system and it went live in seconds. Information was communicated by words and on screens with a good view for every player.

Sessions: The place was packed tight, which together with the lack of oxygen and light caused tension. Players rarely experienced fun. The fair play was ensured with the well organised referees.

Every player was provided with a water bottle in the beginning. Water was provided from 2 ice water jars in the small lobby, which included a screen for the results and was tightly packed with players all the time. The jars emptied quickly so it wasn't easy to refill our bottles especially at the very end when there was no water or coffee at all. Snacks have gone quickly as well.

We had a half an hour break between each session but there was nowhere to go when it was raining. When it was not raining, players gathered on the street to get some light and air.

Catering: I detailed it already, except the snacks. They were nice but were gone if you finished your game late. The lunches were well organised but poorly selected without any choice except for vegetarians.

Prizes and Ceremony: There was a prize for the top 16 players, the 4 winners and the 3 best teams. The best players got local art pieces, the teams got mahjong sets and one of the newly made flower tiles.

The ceremony was very simple with Annika and Petter on the stage. I was thinking of other European Championships, also about the meaning of the word; ceremony and remembered when I won the European championship In Italy and the mayor of Venice gave me the prize.

Conclusion: The tournament was a big success as I already said. Petter and Annika had put everything they had into it. They had help and everything was efficiently organised.

I understand the place for playing was chosen for 168 people and a team never organising a real big tournament couldn't foresee everything could cause problems.

The place we played wasn't ideal for a European Championship. The lack of light and lack of air made it difficult to concentrate for 8 playing hours per day. If you check how many points the winner lost compared to any other European Championship you can make your own conclusion.

The other main issue for me was the complete lack of social events. MIL is pushing mahjong to be a real sport, which is a great idea if we are thinking about perfecting the rules and tournament rules. We are working on those from the very first second, we developed the European Mahjong Association. It is a non-profit voluntary organisation in every part. Coming together for any tournament or organising European Championships is only because we want to do so in our free will, free time and from our own money. Until the last years the reward was the feeling of real social togetherness for every one of us. If somebody won it was an extra and we all knew and admired our champions but we most loved to be together, to play together becoming friends forever. Lately there is no feeling like that. The Uppsala championship was an example. They organised a dinner where there was no place to talk, to sit down opposite each other, to be truly together. The event finished as soon as we finished our food and we were out of the building in 10 minutes after we had put our dessert spoon back on the table.

I am not blaming Petter and Annika, they are great people. I think it is somehow the direction life is taking us. I just want to remind you of the Dutch World Championship where there was a jazz band playing almost all the time and we all danced while watching great players playing mahjong in a bar. Or the Baden European Championship where we had a luxurious dinner in a castle then we went down to the lake dancing for music, enjoying the fireworks organised for us, the great Italian European Championship in Venice, and I can think of many smaller tournaments in Hungary for example with the players going on dragon boats on the Danube before the weekend and when I was cooking pörkölt in a garden for 80 players, or Austria, together in a vineyard, New Years eve in Vienna with a tournament.

You may think I am a romantic. I don't think so. I am like so many mahjong players going to tournaments to perfect my game, experience playing with great players and to be together. To get to know you not only as a player but as a person. Socialising is not only doing something together. It is doing something together and getting closer to each other, it is opening ourselves up. We already lost lots of players for this reason and keep losing them.

Organisers of mahjong events should know this. They should give us space to be together socially. We pay a lot in time and money so we expect value for it. Value like quality time and space for socialising. Every player can take home a prize this way and the feeling, it worth it and that they want to do it again.

About the General assembly

This topic isn't usually part of the observer report but I need to share my experience with all of you.

There were important topics we, the board members organising mahjong in our countries suggested in emails before but there was no time for discussing them, or for anything really. For example, the relationship of EMA and the Chinese organisations in the context of the timing of the

World Cup and WMC. Lots of us had inputs and suggestions about the relationship between Riichi and MCR organisations and about necessary changes in the ways of the European Mahjong Association but we had no space and time to present them.

The other big issue for lots of us was the voting. We did not follow the rules of the EMA. Voting on a google sheet on our mobile phone screen sometimes voting in the name of another country 'accidentally' cannot be official.

A European organisation shouldn't vote online before the technical part was perfected and tried. I cannot accept the decisions made at the General Assembly 2026, 2 July and I am not alone with my opinion.

Ildikó Hargitai

EMA Observer

President of the Hungarian Mahjong Association

19. July 2026